

BALTIMORE:
PAST AND PRESENT.

WITH

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

OF ITS

REPRESENTATIVE MEN.

BALTIMORE:
RICHARDSON & BENNETT.
1871.



A. Winter Davis

HENRY WINTER DAVIS.

THE capital of Maryland has given birth to many very distinguished men, and one of them, HENRY WINTER DAVIS, was born in Annapolis, on the 16th of August, 1817. His father, Rev. Henry Lyon Davis, was a clergyman of the Protestant Episcopal Church, the rector of St. Ann's parish, and at one period, president of St. John's College. His mother, Jane Brown Winter, was a woman of much elegance of mind and person. Early in young Davis's life, his father was displaced from the presidency of St. John's on account of his Federal politics, when he removed to Wilmington, Delaware; eventually returning to Maryland, and settling in Anne Arundel county, in 1827. Henry Winter Davis's early education began at home, under the strict supervision of his aunt, Elizabeth Brown Winter, and a part of his childhood was passed with her in Alexandria, Virginia. Later training with his father, in Wilmington and in Anne Arundel county, fitted him for school, from whence he entered Kenyon college, Ohio, in the autumn of 1833.

The primeval forests of Ohio, forty years ago, had been scarcely invaded, and the greater part of the State was still a wilderness when Davis entered upon his collegiate course. The system at Kenyon at that time was that of a manual labor institution, and the students were obliged to perform all offices for themselves. Davis was not exempt from the general hardship of the place, and in addition to the severe round of duty, his means at this period were exceedingly limited. His father died during his collegiate course; the farm in Anne Arundel county yielded the most scanty return, and his aunt kept him at college only by the strictest economy on her own part. Stern and unpromising as his situation was at this time, no doubt the hard struggle proved of signal benefit in training him for the far greater trials which later in life he was called upon to confront. He graduated on the 6th of September, 1837, at the age of twenty, having by diligence in study passed over his Sophomore year, being successful at its commencement in his examination for the Junior term.

On leaving college, he was obliged, owing to his poverty, to accept a situation as tutor, he steadfastly refusing either to sell the slaves which had been left to him under his father's will, or to receive a cent of their wages. He was enabled to enter the University of Virginia in October, 1839, where he pursued a thorough legal course, and also familiarized himself with the great masters of history and philosophy, and acquired a knowledge of French and German, in addition to the Greek and Latin languages, which he had learned at Kenyon. At the University of Virginia he thoroughly laid the foundation of the elegant scholarship which distinguished him not less than his legal research and brilliant oratory.

After a thorough course of study at this celebrated institution of learning, Mr. Davis returned to Alexandria and entered upon the practice of the law. His ability was soon acknowledged, and his industry early obtained an extensive business. He was a frequent contributor to the newspapers, and many of his articles on political subjects attracted great attention. In 1845 he married Miss Constance Gardiner. This lady lived but a few years after marriage, and not long after her death, Mr. Davis left Alexandria. He settled in Baltimore in 1850. His reputation as a talented and rising lawyer had preceded him, and he at once took rank in this city with the leading members of the bar. In politics, he was allied with the Whig party, and took an active part in the Scott campaign of 1852. On the defeat and final extinction of the Whigs, Mr. Davis adopted the principles of the American party. He was elected to the National House of Representatives from the fourth district of Maryland, to the thirty-fourth, thirty-fifth and thirty-sixth Congresses. In the Hall of Representatives, he was very soon recognized as one of its ablest debaters. With thorough mastery of the subject under discussion, he always commanded the attention of the House by his strictly logical reasoning, his array of facts, his knowledge of constitutional law, the chaste but fervid eloquence of his diction, the strength and melody of his voice, and his handsome and commanding presence. Even his strongest political opponents were ready to acknowledge his ability, and listen to him with pleasure. He supported Mr. Fillmore for the Presidency in 1856, and Mr. Bell in 1860.

With the election of Mr. Lincoln, the political differences which had already so deeply agitated the entire country, took more decided shape, although the friends of peace, North and South, still fervently hoped for a pacific solution of all troubles. It is not

within the province of this biography to discuss the merits of the question. Mr. Davis strenuously adopted the side of the Union against secession. On the fourth day of the second session of the thirty-sixth Congress, the famous committee of thirty-three was raised, Mr. Davis as the member for Maryland. He argued in favor of the right of coercion by the general government, of States preparing to secede from the Union. The fall of Fort Sumter finally destroyed all hopes of averting civil war, as the entire nation rose in arms. The coming awful struggle subdued all other interests in America, while in Europe "kings sat still, and nations turned to watch the issue."

On the 15th of April, 1861, President Lincoln issued his proclamation, calling a special session of Congress. This making an election necessary in Maryland, Mr. Davis on the same day offered himself as a candidate for Congress on the basis of "the unconditional maintenance of the Union." He labored with great activity until the day of election, June 13th, but was defeated by Mr. Henry May, the conservative Union candidate. Mr. Davis, however, did not cease his exertions, but supported Mr. Lincoln's administration with untiring zeal. The question of emancipation did not at first enter into the strife, and not for some time after the battle of Antietam was it agitated in Maryland. At length, early in 1863, it was mooted, its advocates at first being very few in number. Mr. Davis gave to the measure his most earnest support, and in the campaign of 1863 worked with prodigious industry on the platform of "immediate emancipation by constitutional means." After extraordinary exertions on his part, not only visiting all sections of the State to address popular meetings, but directing the principal correspondence, and writing leading articles for the newspapers, he beheld the cause of immediate emancipation completely successful. He was returned to the thirty-eighth Congress by the Unconditional Union party. In this, his last public function, he stood an acknowledged leader of the House of Representatives, and was looked upon as one certain of much higher political distinction than he had already won. At the close of the thirty-eighth Congress he retired from public life. His excessive labors, and the excitement and anxiety of the past few years, had worn upon his strength, and he had determined to visit Europe in the spring of 1866, to remain some length of time. He was suddenly seized with illness toward the latter part of December, 1865, but was not considered in serious danger until the day preceding his death. He died on Saturday, December 30th, aged forty-eight years. Unusual

honors were paid to his memory. His funeral was largely attended by members of both Houses of Congress, and by cabinet ministers. The Legislatures of several States passed resolutions of regret for his loss, and in the National House of Representatives, an oration on his life and character was delivered by Hon. John A. J. Creswell, of Maryland, on the 22d of February, 1866.

Mr. Davis was twice married; his second wife, Mrs. Nancy Davis, daughter of John B. Morris, of this city, resides in Baltimore with her two daughters.

Beside the published speeches of Mr. Davis, he wrote several pamphlets on political subjects, or, on matters relating to the Protestant Episcopal Church, of which he was an earnest member. He also, in 1852, published a large work in one volume, the result of researches of historical nature, entitled "the War of Ormuzd and Ahriman in the nineteenth century."

The time has not yet arrived, and probably is still distant, when an impartial estimate will be formed of Henry Winter Davis. He flourished at the most momentous period of our national history, when the passions of men were most violently excited. But probably all parties will agree in according to him high resolve and unflinching courage, untiring industry and perseverance, much learning and cultivation, excellence of private character, and striking and brilliant gifts as an American orator and statesman.